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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/20/2032

TAGS: KIRF PHUM PGOV SOCI CH

SUBJECT: China's Young Urban Christians: Optimistic and Nationalistic, But Are They Tough Enough to Lead?

(U) Classified by Consul General Robert Goldberg for Reasons: 1.4 (b) AND (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: China's new generation of urban Christians are supportive of government policies and confident that relations between underground churches and religious authorities will continue to improve, according to south China church elders and missionaries. However, older Christians worry that today's "Generation Y" underground church members, having grown up in the economically vibrant 1990's and 2000's, might not be tough or savvy enough to be effective church leaders should the government resume harsher crackdowns and enforcement of religious activities. Two young Christians with whom we met admit that they know little about the "darker side" of China's modern history but highlighted their internationalist outlook and ability to use information technology for sophisticated networking. END SUMMARY.

China's Generation Y: Optimistic, Patriotic, but Naive

¶2. (C) Like most Chinese of their generation, young Christians in south China are "optimistic, patriotic, but naive," according to Brother Yun (strictly protect), a parent and member of Guangzhou's Li Jiang Christian Fellowship. Ruth Han (strictly protect), an elder in the same fellowship, told us that young Christians, having grown up in an era of rapid economic growth and expansion, are optimistic about job opportunities and are proud of China's growing stature on the international stage. Educated with high school and college curricula that focus almost exclusively on positive government accomplishments, Han said, young urban adults largely support the central government's economic, political, and even religion-focused policies. Two parents told us that Christian youth displayed a lack of understanding about how the Chinese government implemented and enforced religious regulations; this could hobble their ability to effectively organize and lead underground church groups in the future. (Note: Yun and Han, along with several other parents in the church, have chosen to educate their children in home schools instead of the public school system. End note.)

Naive, but Networked and Outward Looking

¶3. (C) Some young Christians admit that their generation lacks a comprehensive understanding of China's modern history, and told us that their parents had a much better awareness of how the government worked. Willow Yang (strictly protect), an assistant lecturer at Guangdong Industrial University and recent founder of the

unregistered Guangzhou Young Persons' Christian Association, and Evy Yun (strictly protect), an English teacher, both acknowledged that they knew little about the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, or the Tiananmen Square massacre. They had not learned about these events in school.

¶4. (C) Despite this lack of historical background and understanding, Evy Yun said, young adults were technology-savvy and more network-oriented. She explained that she and her contemporaries regularly read internet news reports, browsed Christian blogs, and downloaded religious music from the internet - all on Chinese-language websites hosted overseas. Online censorship wasn't a problem, according to Yun; she and her friends all knew how to use proxies to circumvent China's "great firewall."

¶5. (C) In addition, both Yang and Yun shared a perspective influenced by China's rising international standing. Yang explained that today's Chinese missionaries hoped to bring their religion to the Middle East. She pointed out that China's increasing trade with that region, plus the fact that American and European missionaries were "no longer welcome," provided great opportunities for Chinese evangelists. Yun said that she and several friends hope to attend seminary in the United States, returning to China afterwards to continue working in Christian education.

New Generation: Better Relations with Government?

¶6. (C) China's new generation of underground church leaders foresees improved relations with religious authorities and increasing engagement and dialogue with government-sanctioned Three Self churches, according to Taiwan businessman Newman Huang (strictly protect), a sales director at Via Technologies Shenzhen and leader of an underground church. Huang pointed out that much of Shenzhen's church growth in the last four years has been the result of increasing membership of young urban professionals aged 20-35, a

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demographic representing "China's future" that authorities would rather not rile up if possible. Guangzhou's Yang agreed, saying that the new generation of Christians saw less of a wall between members of Three Self and underground churches, pointing out that the association she founded had members from both types of churches.

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